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SUBJECT: Vandal Trashes Jewish School in Vienna

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: A prominent Jewish school in Vienna, the Lauder Chabad School, was the subject of a destructive rampage early Sunday morning. The suspect, who seems to have acted alone, reportedly identified himself to police at his arrest as "Adolf Hitler." However, it remains unclear whether the man had a political motive, or was simply deranged. There was no guard at the school at the time of the attack. The Vienna Jewish Community (IKG) explained that it could not provide 24-hour security coverage. Vienna's Christian and Muslim communities expressed solidarity with the Jewish community over the incident. The school is a project of the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, a charity of the former U.S. Ambassador to Austria. End Summary.

¶1. (U) At about 2:30 a.m. on Sunday, November 26, a man broke into Vienna's Lauder Chabad School, a facility that educates some 360 children. The man then went on a rampage, breaking windows, glass doors and showcases with an iron rod. No one from the school was present during the attack, and there were no injuries. The school was in session as usual on Monday, November 27, the worse for wear but open for business.

¶2. (SBU) Police arrested the man, a roughly 30-year-old reportedly of Croatian origin, as soon as he left the building. School board head Rabbi Jacob Biderman told journalists that the man told the police that he was "Adolf Hitler." Police reports record that the man said he "does not like Jews." Nevertheless, police have not yet determined whether the man had neo-Nazi links, or was simply deranged.

¶3. (SBU) Biderman's office told us it was rather hard to believe that a single person could have done all the damage, especially because some of the destroyed glass was bulletproof. However, no/no evidence has yet turned up that would indicate the involvement of anyone besides the suspect in custody.

¶4. (SBU) The school was not under guard at the time of the attack. Ariel Muzicant, the President of the Jewish Community (IKG), explained at a press conference that the IKG simply did not have the financial resources to provide 24-hour guards at the 40 Jewish institutions in Vienna. As a result, there is a guard presence only when students and staff are present. However, Muzicant said, the IKG will have to look into expanding the school's security measures. IKG Executive Director Erika Jakubovits told us the IKG was concerned about the emotional impact of the attack, both on the school's students and on the broader Jewish community. (Note: The Austrian government contributes funds toward IKG security needs. The government has also offered to provide police coverage, and does so in the case of some facilities. However, the IKG has rejected police coverage in many cases, arguing that it needs more specialized security services, and has called instead for increased

funding. End note.)

¶15. (U) The Muslim Community (IGGO) expressed deep concern over the attack. IGO integration representative Omar Al Rawi termed it an "assault against open, tolerant Vienna." Christoph Cardinal Schoenborn called the attack an "act of barbarism." Citing the school's role as a symbol of the reconstruction of the Jewish community after the Holocaust, he strongly condemned anti-Semitic talk as "absolutely unacceptable." Similarly, the Austrian Protestant Church and the Austrian Ecumenical Council expressed "shock and disgust" over the attack.

¶16. (SBU) The Lauder Chabad School is a project of the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, a charitable organization under the sponsorship of former U.S. Ambassador to Austria Ronald Lauder. The school seeks to reinvigorate Jewish life in Vienna. The Foundation's website notes, "the curriculum, designed to develop proud, informed young Jews, focuses on the creative teaching of Hebrew, Talmud and Jewish history in addition to high-level secular studies." The Foundation sponsored the construction of the present school building in 1999. Muzicant has often expressed regret to us for the fact that the Foundation chose to build a largely glass construction, making it extremely vulnerable to attack. While the Foundation pays the school's operating costs, the IKG is responsible for security, Muzicant told us.